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Army documents reveal warfare tests in St. Louis

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The Army Chemical Corps, working with the Central Intelligence Agency, conducted open-air chemical warfare tests 35 times in the streets of St. Louis in the spring of 1953, according to declassified federal documents.

The documents reveal that zinc cadmium sulfide was sprayed in 20 residential areas, 13 downtown locations and two larger, 5-square-mile sections of the city.

The documents were obtained by the Church of Scientology, and the information was confirmed by an Army official.

No adverse health effects have been recorded as a result of the tests, according to Dr. Helen Bruce, the city's health commissioner.

But she and numerous other long-term city officials said they were unaware of the chemical warfare testing until they were called by *The Kansas City Times*.

Officials of the Church of Scientology say they are asking toxicologists to study the potential effect the chemical could have had on the health of St. Louis residents in the 1950s.

The tests apparently were designed to study the offensive capabilities of chemical warfare and to gauge the vulnerability of U.S. cities to Soviet chemical attacks.

Zinc cadmium sulfide, a yellow crystalline substance, is not known to have any adverse effect on living organisms because it is rather insoluble and enters the system very slowly, chemical experts say.

To become toxic, the substance would have to release its cadmium component, which would require a prolonged chemical change. If the cadmium were released, however, the toxic metal could concentrate in living organisms, according to a 1975 report on environmental pollutants by the Congressional Research Service.

Continuous exposure to very low levels of cadmium could cause chronic kidney damage in people, the report says. Extended exposure to high concentrations of cadmium can contribute to cancer, hypertension and cardiovascular disease, the congressional report says.

Army Maj. Lee DeLorme in Washington confirmed that the Army Chemical Corps, which no longer exists, performed the experiments in St. Louis.

A CIA spokesman, Cathy Pherson, said that "back in the 1950s, there was a lot of cooperation between the Chemical Corps and the CIA."

The Chemical Corps conducted the aerosol tests with zinc cadmium sulfide from a second-floor garage at 5589 Pershing Ave. in St. Louis, according to the recently released documents. About 12,000 pounds of testing equipment was set up at the garage, which was in the western part of the city, for use in the experiments.

An undetermined amount of the chemical was released mechanically in powder form during the morning, afternoon and early evening at Forest Park, the city's largest, and from two rooftops in the city. The other test sites were not identified.

After the chemical was released, the fallout was measured on clean glass plates at five places up to 1,500 feet downwind of the release point.

Before the tests were made, Army officials met with city officials who for the most part cooperated fully with the project, the documents say. However, many of the leading city officials at the time of the tests, including the police chief and the mayor, have died since then.

For several years, the Scientologists have been trying to piece together thousands of censored documents pertaining to CIA-sponsored germ warfare experiments in the United States. The Scientologists want to promote a moratorium on all chemical warfare, including its reported use by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

"We're planning to sponsor an international conference to discuss an accord on this," said Jim Thompson, a Scientology spokesman.

The documents pertaining to St. Louis were obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. They indicate that the Parks Commission offered some resistance to the testing project.

"Minor difficulties with the Parks Commission were ironed out with the completion of the change in city administration," says one of the 70 pages of documents reviewed by *The Times*.

The documents also say various industries gave the Army permission to use their property as field sites for the tests. The Monsanto Co., a major chemical firm in St. Louis, the Socony-Vacuum refinery in East St. Louis, Ill., and Granite City Steel Co., which is in an Illinois suburb of St. Louis, are among those mentioned as having cooperated in the effort.

The chemical released in St. Louis apparently was traced to some residential dwellings. The documents state that some residents "were found to be extremely cooperative" when asked to allow air samples to be taken in their homes.

"Penetration of downtown buildings by the aerosol cloud was observed," the documents also note.

In St. Louis, 197 civilians were hired by the Chemical Corps to work part time or full time on the program. At least 17,591 man-hours were spent on the project, the documents show.

However, "The tight labor market in St. Louis made it difficult to obtain adequate personnel, particularly responsible personnel," the documents say.

"The scope of several of the tests was limited by failure of employees to report for duty. It was necessary to discard some data because of poor quality and incompleteness," the documents say.

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